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## ON THE ESTABLISHMENT AND EARLY ACTIVITY OF THE SOVIET CONSULATE IN KÖNIGSBERG (1923—1925)

*Yu. V. Kostyashov*\*



*This article analyses the reasons behind the restoration of diplomatic relations between Russia and Germany after World War I, as well as the fundamental differences in the performance of Russian imperial and Soviet consular missions in East Prussia. On the basis of the earlier unknown documents from the Central Russian archives and the Political archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, the author describes the establishment of the Soviet Consulate in Königsberg in 1923 and the contribution of the first Consul of the USSR in East Prussia, Yulian Boshkovich, to the development of bilateral relations in 1923—1925. The author considers the adverse political conditions under which Soviet diplomats were compelled to operate in Germany. The conclusion is that the principal line of Yu. S. Boshkovich's activity concerned preparations for the opening of the USSR trade mission in Königsberg, as well as ensuring strong representation of Soviet foreign trade associations at the Eastern Fair.*

**Key words:** East Prussia, Königsberg, consulate, Yu. S. Boshkovich, history of diplomacy, Soviet-German relations, Eastern Fair

A Russian Consulate was opened in Königsberg on the order of Yekaterina II in 1873. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its status increased to that of a Consulate General. According to 1820, 1858, and 1902 charters, consuls were not considered diplomatic representatives and the right of extritoriality did not extend to them. They were supposed to “safeguard the

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interests of Russian trade and navigation” and “uphold the honour of the Russian name”; consuls also settled disputes between Russian nationals residing abroad, prepared birth, marriage, and death certificates, issued passports and visas, and provided the home government with the economic information [1—5]. As World War I began, the Consulate in East Prussia ceased to exist [6].

Soviet consulates were fundamentally different institutions in comparison to those of the pre-revolution period. Their functioning was expounded in the 1921 guidelines of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (PCFA) and the 1926 USSR Consular Charter. In contrast to the similar pre-war charter, consulates were bereft of their function of a trade mediator and a market informant and became a tool of surveillance of the Soviet citizens sent abroad on official missions so that they behaved “according to the requirements of the Soviet policy”. Each owner of a “hammer and sickle” passport was supposed to register at the consulate, each arrival and departure had to be reported to Moscow, and a copy of the report had to be sent to the Ambassador in Berlin. In collaboration with the Ambassador, the Consul had to “take necessary measures” (the nature of measures was not further specified) if the behaviour of a Soviet citizen went beyond the framework of the party's policy. The first commandment of a consul was to remember that they “represent the authority of workers and peasants”. This class approach suggested that the consul was strictly forbidden to have close or informal relations with the “local bourgeoisie circles”. Finally, another novelty was that consuls were responsible for “accepting and transferring to the PCFA the applications from workers and representatives of the working class” willing to enter the Soviet Union. In fact, the consulate was supposed to recruit surreptitiously specialists and qualified work force [7—9].

The diplomatic relations between Russia and Germany restored after the ratification of the Brest Peace Treaty were suspended by the German party in October 1918 — as a response to the PCFA's attempt to provide the German working class with “revolutionary help”. However, the rupture did not last long. A Soviet political writer D. Trius wrote, “Germany, buckling under the weight of the Treaty of Versailles, started to turn its eye eastward on vast agricultural Russia which was waiting for the economic cooperation with an industrially and technologically developed country. The less hope the German society had for the Entente, the more rationally it considered peaceful cooperation with rich in raw materials Russia” [10, p. 24].

Favourable conditions for the restoration of bilateral connections emerged after the Treaty of Rapallo had been signed on April 16, 1922. Article 3 of the Treaty proclaimed that “Diplomatic and consular relations between the German Reich and the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic shall be resumed immediately. The conditions for the admission of the Consuls of both Parties shall be determined by means of a special agreement” [11, p. 224]. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspaper stated that nowhere had the Treaty been hailed more than in East Prussia. The periodical also stressed that, although Germany and Russia did not have an immediate border, the

future of the East Prussian trade depended entirely on the restoration of economic relations between the states [12].

Before the conclusion of the negotiations, on February 2, 1922, the top officials of the Königsberg Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which contained the following request with a reference to the disclosed intention of the Soviet government to open a number of consulates in Germany, “as early as in the pre-war years, Russia-Königsberg trade turnover was quite significant, the city was an important centre of transit trade on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. The economic prospects of Königsberg deteriorated considerably as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, since the competing former German ports of Danzig and Memel are now situated in foreign territories. If the earlier contacts with Russia are not restored, it will threaten Königsberg and German maritime commerce which will lose an important base for penetrating the Russian market. Thus, we request that, if Soviet consulates are opened in Germany, it would be advisable to open such a consulate in Königsberg in the first place”<sup>1</sup> [13, Nr. IE 1375]<sup>2</sup>.

In response to this request, on February 24, 1922, a member of the prominent dynasty of Prussian diplomats — the Maltxans — wrote that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly supported the rational suggestion of the Chamber of Commerce and would recommend the establishment of a consulate in Königsberg as soon as the negotiations began. The diplomat also emphasised that at the preliminary consultations the parties had discussed only the opening of a Soviet mission office in Hamburg, since, according to the Soviet data, the port city accounted for 90% of the Soviet trade [13, Nr. IE 1375].

The negotiations on the establishment of consulates continued throughout a whole year. It seems that the blame lay with the German side, which was afraid of closer contacts with the revolutionary Russia. Finally, in spring 1923, the process got off the ground: on March 15, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested the approval of the Prussian Ministry of Commerce and Entrepreneurship for the opening of a Consulate in Königsberg, justifying their request by the aspiration to increase the attractiveness and ensure the success of the recently established Eastern Fair [13, Nr. IE 1294]. The reply of March 16 suggested that the Ministry of Commerce had no objection from the economic point of view, but another request concerning the domestic political situation was sent to the Ministry of Interior [13, Nr. IE 1356]. The State Secretary of the Prussian Ministry of Interior, Friedrich Meister replied on March 31 as follows, “In view of the need to foster the ties with Russia, as well as the economic requirements of East Prussia, I would like to set aside the considerations relating to the domestic political situation and

<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: here and below, excerpts from archive documents are rendered in English from the author’s Russian translation of the German original.

<sup>2</sup> Archive files are identified by a six-digit code. Since pages are not numerated, references also contain the incoming/outgoing number of the document.

approve the opening of a Russian consular mission in Königsberg on condition of reciprocity” [13, Nr. IE 1638].

The establishment of a Consulate in Königsberg was marked by a serious dispute among the top officials of the USSR PCFA over the candidate for the Consul's position. This issue was considered three times at meetings of the Organisation Bureau of the Party's Central Committee and twice at meetings of the Politburo. At first, on September 18, 1923, following a suggestion made by the USSR plenipotentiary in Berlin V. Koop, the Politburo confirmed the appointment of V.N. Rembelinsky [14, D. 381, l. 4]. This decision was opposed by the people's commissar G. V. Chicherin on October 18 [14, D. 388, l. 1]. Finally, after protracted negotiations, comrade Yu.S. Boshkovich was appointed Soviet Consul in Königsberg [15, p. 251].

There were rather trivial reasons behind the fierce battle for the position of the Consul. In the conditions of the Civil war and the post-war devastation, a position abroad was the most desired sinecure in the Soviet Union. Soviet citizens working abroad included former revolutionaries, political prisoners, party functionaries, as well as their relatives, friends, and acquaintances, which gave rise to considerable competition in this sphere. Although the number of vacancies was increasing each year, it was not sufficient. By the way, several thousand USSR employees worked in the European countries at the time. Only the trade mission in Berlin had a staff of 500 people in the 1920s! And there were also various foreign trade associations and joint societies with large staffs. All those people received salaries that were considered quite high at the time. In the mid-1920s, the salary of the Soviet Consul in Königsberg was 165 USD per month, which was an enormous amount for the time; a secretary and a typist received from 100 to 120 USD [16, p. 11].

On November 8, 1923, the PCFA informed the German Ambassador in Moscow about the appointment of Yulian S. Boshkovich the Consul in Königsberg, who was “going to assume the office in the near future” [13, Nr. E 5500]; on November 17, the office of the USSR plenipotentiary in Berlin handed Yu.S. Boshkovich's consular patent over to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a request for the issue of an *exequatur*<sup>3</sup>. The request also contained the personal data of the appointed Consul, “Boshkovich MD was born in 1891 and recently served as a plenipotentiary of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic for international organisations that provided aid during the last case of famine in the Ukraine” [13, Nr. E 5585]. The German Reich Commissioner for public order approved of the issue of *exequatur*, stressing in his letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of November 23 that he had not come across any information that would politically discredit the Russian state official Boshkovich [13, Nr. E 5735]. A similar approval was given by the Minister of commerce and entrepreneurship [13, Nr. E 6084].

<sup>3</sup> Consul's *exequatur* (Latin: *let it be executed*) is a permission of the head of the host state issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs guaranteeing the consul's rights and privileges of office (within the consular district).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also received a note from the Upper President (German: Oberpräsident) of East Prussia, Ernst Siehr of December 10, in which he described his impressions of his first meeting with the Consul:

On November 28, Consul Yulian Boshkovich introduced himself to me and handed over to me the attached letters from Messrs Krestinsky<sup>4</sup> and Pepper. He informed me that he had recently come to Berlin from Moscow and had earlier spent much time abroad and had cooperated with American relief agencies under the auspices of the Red Cross. The Consul has a fairly good command of German and comes across as a nice man. As Consul Wiegandt, the director of the Königsberg Fair Committee, informed me confidentially, Mr Boshkovich was resolved to facilitate and develop economic ties between Germany and Russia. Consul Wiegandt is convinced that Mr Boshkovich is not a proponent of the Communist Party. Probably, the Consul's secretary is a communist. Over his short stay, Mr Boshkovich established himself as a man deeply interested in fulfilling his responsibilities. He visits the Eastern Fair Committee almost every day to receive new information. To sum up, I suppose that there are no serious reasons to doubt the nature of his activities [13, Nr. E 6079].

Seven weeks later, on January 23, 1924, E. Siehr sent the Minister of commerce and entrepreneurship a confidential letter containing information, which was received from the informants of the criminal police, on the activities of Consul Boshkovich. The report mentioned that the Soviet representative was "visited by many different people, predominantly Jews and the unemployed. Boshkovich is allegedly involved in the preparation of those willing to move to his country and promises workers to settle them in the Soviet Russia... Fifty people have applied so far..."

Informants also mentioned that "a bolshevist Jew, whose name our contact has not learnt yet, often visits the Consul and stays for some time". In the conclusion, the police official regretted that it was impossible to place the bolshevist Consul Boshkovich under effective surveillance due to the insufficiency of funds allocated for paying "trusted persons" [13, Nr. E 731].

The Consulate was scheduled to be opened on February 1; however, the activities of the Soviet "recruiters" considered suspicious by the German authorities resulted in Boshkovich's exequatur being issued only on February 19 [13, Nr. E 1456]. A little bit later, all suspicions were dispelled. Upper President Siehr sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 12, 1924 which said:

The unanimous opinion of the President of the Police and the Office of the State Criminal Police in Königsberg, the Consul and his staff are not involved in any propaganda hostile towards Germany. Shortly after the Consulate had opened, the Consul's efforts to recruit German citizens for the immigration into Russia attracted certain attention. But since it concerned mostly farmers with some capital, there are no reasons to suppose that the Communist party is involved in the recruitment. Anyway, as to emigration,

<sup>4</sup> N.N. Krestinsky was the Soviet plenipotentiary in Germany in 1921—1930.

the Consulate acted as an information source and a mediator. Potential candidates had to be warned by our competent authorities that, in case of emigration, no one will guarantee their safety in Russia. No one has emigrated so far [13, Nr. OP 3678].

The first months of the Consulate's operation were marked by an unpleasant incident about which the Upper President of East Prussia informed the Minister of Interior in April 1924:

The local Russian Consul informed me on April 7 that the Consulate's sign with the Soviet state emblem had been removed on the night of April 7. The Consul informed his home government about the incident. I discussed the situation with the Consul and managed to convince him that the incident was nothing more than a childish prank, since the sign — a cardboard shield — was secured with nails not far above the ground and could be easily removed by a passer-by. I expressed my sympathy and commissioned an investigation. I will inform you about the results of the investigation as soon as they are available. I suggested that the Consulate should purchase a sturdy sign and place it far above the ground to avoid further incidents. I emphasised that the Russian government should not pay significant attention to this incident [13, Nr. E 1988].

At the beginning of May, E. Siehr informed Consul Boshkovich that the investigation had not yielded any results. However, he stressed, there were definitely no political motives behind the disappearance of the sign [13, Nr. OP 1453].

Nevertheless, the incident repeated. Only that time, it was the flag. In accordance with the USSR-German Consular Convention approved by the Council of People's Commissars on April 8, 1924, the consular shield with the state emblem had to be placed in offices, whereas the Consulate building and the Consuls' flat and car were supposed to wave the Soviet flag [17, l. 37]. A new incident happened soon after the Consulate had moved to the centre of the city, where it occupied several rooms in the building of the Handelshof<sup>5</sup>. Yu. S. Boshkovich described it in detail in his report to the Soviet representative in Berlin, N. N. Krestinsky, and the deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, M. M. Litvinov on January 22, 1925:

I report that on the night of January 21, the flag, which we hung to commemorate V. I. Lenin's death and the events of January 9, 1905, was detached and stolen. Here are the details of this obnoxious raid:

According to the telegram of the plenipotentiary's office: on January 21, at 5 p. m., the Soviet flag was placed above the Consulate building (at an approximate height of 3.5 m). At the same time, I contacted the local police and asked them to guard the flag. In response, I was informed that they had immediately sent two police officers.

In the evening, around 11 p. m., according to the porter, a small group of fascist hooligans gathered at the building shouting anti-Soviet obscenities.

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<sup>5</sup> Today this building houses the Kaliningrad city hall. It was built in 1923 to the design of the architect H. Hopp.



One of them claimed that the flag would be removed that night. When the porter asked the police officer why he ignored those shouts without identifying the hooligan, the police officers laughed and stepped aside. At 2 a.m., the porter heard noises at the building entrance. He ran out into the street but did not notice anything. The flag was missing.

I learned about the incident around 1 a.m. on January 22 from the Consulate's secretary, comrade Serebryany, who happened to stop by at the Consulate and noticed that the flag was missing. I reported the incident to the Upper President and the Police President, a protest with a request for an investigation was filed. I must add that, in my opinion, the flag was removed not without the police connivance, since the Consulate building is located in the city centre, not far from the head Police office, and there is always a police patrol in front of the building. I believe that the police officer could not but see the people who removed the flag secured at a level of the first floor, and the removal of which probably required a ladder [18, l. 73—73 inv.].

The Consul asked the plenipotentiary to make a “strong protest” to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Representatives of the East Prussian authorities expressed their regret to the Consul in oral and written forms, whereas the Upper President E. Siehr sent an official apology letter [18, l. 75—76.]. He also rendered it possible — in order to avoid such incidents in the future — to recommend that the Consul should remove the flag at night [18, l. 90]. In his turn Plenipotentiary Krestinsky reported from Berlin that the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs also expressed its concern, after which he considered it excessive to file a note of protest [18, l. 74].

The principal area of Consul Yu.S. Boshkovich's activity was the preparation for the opening of a Soviet trade mission in Königsberg and ensuring strong representation of Soviet foreign trade associations at the Eastern Fair. The Consulate's efforts were disrupted by the conflict that took place in Berlin on May 3, 1924, when the German police launched a search in the offices of the Soviet trade mission and arrested 12 employees on suspicion of subversive activities [19]. German newspapers wrote that the trade mission was an “international nursery for criminals” and that “a half of German communist party are employed there” [20, p. 5—7]. On May 26, the closing of the trade mission was announced, which, according to the Russian language Berlin newspaper *Vremya*, equalled “the cessation of all trade operations between the USSR and Germany” [21, p. 2]. As a result, all Boshkovich's work turned out to have been in vain, which was reported as follows, “The scheduled opening of the Königsberg branch of the Chamber of Commerce is not to take place” [22, p. 4]. At the same time, the USSR refused to take part in the 9<sup>th</sup> Eastern Fair which was held on August 9—12. Although by that time the conflict in bilateral relations had been settled, it was with regret that the Königsberg press wrote about the absence of an official Russian exhibition pavilion at the Fair. However, at the last moment, Yu.S. Boshkovich managed to organise a visit of “representatives of some private Russian firms, predominantly involved in trade in haberdashery, pharmaceuticals, and colonial goods [23, p. 7—8], but it was apparently insufficient.



However, the efforts towards the development of ties between East Prussia and the USSR taken by Yu. S. Boshkovich proved rewarding as early as the following year. The Soviet Union made a triumphal appearance at the Eastern Fair in Königsberg. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* newspaper wrote in its account of the Fair that a major attraction had been the Russian section which had exhibited manufactured goods alongside raw materials. So many people wanted to attend the exhibition that at times the access to it was restricted [24].

Yu. S. Boshkovich served in East Prussia as a Consul for just over a year. On March 21, 1925, he handed the responsibilities over to his successor Ye. D. Kantor [18, l. 90] and left Königsberg on April 14, 1925. Before his departure, as the newly appointed Consul reported, the local economic and political elite gave him a banquet which was chaired by the Supreme Burgomaster of Königsberg, Hans Lohmeyer. According to Ye. D. Kantor, the atmosphere and toasts made at the banquet showed that the province's business circles and authorities were deeply interested in the restoration of economic ties between the USSR and East Prussia [18, l. 112].

The further career of the first Soviet Consul in Königsberg, Yu. S. Boshkovich, was not related to the field of diplomacy. In the 1930s, he worked in the People's Commissariat for Domestic Trade. The latest discovered information on his activities is dated May 1941 [25, l. 18].

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